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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2670
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1039
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3059
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2444
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000968

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SUBJECT: OSH TRIP: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH OSH CITY MAYOR

BISHKEK 00000968 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana Gfoeller for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On September 17, Ambassador met with Jumadyl Isakov, Mayor of Osh City since 2005, to discuss foreign investment, preparations for the upcoming winter, local elections, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and problems with the Uzbeks. According to an official census, the population of Osh is approximately 285,000, but Isakov estimated that over 600,000 live in the city and its suburbs. Describing the city's political make-up, Isakov said that thirty deputies form the Osh City parliament, in addition to ten territorial public councils. Isakov praised U.S. assistance to the south and welcomed further cooperation with his administration. End summary.

FOREIGN CAPITAL SLOWLY FLOWS INTO OSH

¶2. (C) Isakov touted the numerous foreign investments in Osh and the developing tourism industry. Isakov said that within the last two years, 27 joint ventures had opened in Osh, including nine brick factories, eight of which were started by Chinese entrepreneurs and the ninth by Austrians. He said that the Kyrgyz-Chinese cotton processing facility provides 650 jobs to the area, and he also described the initial steps toward opening a Kyrgyz-German denim factory. Isakov said that tourism may develop additional income-generating jobs for the region, and he expressed his hope that Mount Suleyman, located in the center of the city, would be designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site. He said that Osh is also used as a launching point for mountain climbers attempting to summit the 7,100 meter high Lenin Peak. When asked the origin of most tourists, Isakov said that many travelers come from Europe or the U.S., and they usually visit Kyrgyzstan as a part of their Central Asian tour package.

OSH PREPS FOR THE UPCOMING WINTER

13. (C) Isakov acknowledged electricity shortages as a result of water deficiencies at the Toktogul reservoir but claimed that the Osh City thermal power station (TETS) was fully prepared for the winter months. The Mayor expressed his disappointment that the rolling blackouts, cutting power for eight hours a day in private homes and less for businesses, severely hampered area enterprises and disrupted the lives of the local population. Isakov said that the city's thermal plant had already accumulated over 1000 tons of coal and over 7000 tons of mazut and did not anticipate an interruption of service this winter.

14. (C) Ambassador asked about the possibility of schools closing for up to three months this winter. In response, he said that out of 55 schools in Osh, most are heated by the TETS. He said that it was illogical to shut down schools for three months because, unless the water was drained from the heating pipes of the school buildings -- a time-consuming operation -- the schools would continue to be heated with or without the students in attendance.

ISAKOV ON LOCAL ELECTIONS

15. (C) Although Osh City parliamentary elections were already held last October, Isakov spoke of preparations for the upcoming local elections to be held across the country on October 5. He said that he expected only three political parties to participate in the south: President Bakiyev's ruling party of Ak-Jol, the Communist Party, and the Social Democrats. Noting that preparations in the southern districts were going well, Isakov highlighted the President's calls for Ak-Jol representatives to refrain from interfering

BISHKEK 00000968 002.2 OF 002

with the local elections.

DEALING WITH HIZB UT-TAHRIR

16. (C) Isakov stated that a variety of religious confessions function peacefully in Osh and the local government did not interfere with the religious community -- except when dealing with HT. He said that HT becomes more active during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, slaughtering livestock and distributing the meat and other foods to low-income families.

When asked whether members were local or foreign, the Mayor speculated that they were Kyrgyz citizens but that they received financial backing from abroad. Isakov believed that repression was counterproductive when dealing with HT. Instead, he felt that educating the population about the goals of HT, via local Imams' sermons, would be the most effective way of discouraging support for the Islamic group.

RELATIONS WITH THE UZBEKS

17. (C) When asked about interaction with neighboring countries, Isakov immediately focused the discussion on the problematic relations with Uzbekistan. He said that continued efforts to demarcate the border between their two countries were progressing at a very slow pace. He noted that the commission charged with facilitating the delimitation process only met once per year, which offered little opportunity for movement towards a defined border. Isakov felt it vital that the two countries facilitate an easier border crossing process, especially with existing enclaves in each country, citing the need for citizens to visit their relatives and conduct trade with their neighbors.

Isakov also claimed that the Uzbek government continued to siphon natural gas from deposits that lie on both sides of the border. He believed that the majority of the gas fields are on Kyrgyz territory and, therefore, his government should have majority rights in controlling the extraction process.

PRAISING U.S. ASSISTANCE TO OSH

18. (C) Isakov proudly spoke of the productive collaboration efforts between his administration and the U.S. government, specifically citing USAID programs and his relationship with the Peace Corps. The Mayor applauded U.S. government assistance, claiming that USAID projects implemented within the communities fill a void that his administration would otherwise not have the resources to address. Isakov spoke of his recent meeting with Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Osh, where he expressed his appreciation for their work in the communities. Isakov also said that his office cooperates with the volunteers in a number of areas and supports their projects whenever possible.

COMMENT

19. (C) Acknowledging the need for assistance to his city, Isakov has proven to be cooperative with U.S. government programs in the past, and he welcomed additional collaboration. Having traveled to the U.S. on an International Visitors program in 2002 that focused on combating terrorism, Isakov seemed to be less suspicious and have a better understanding of U.S. activities in Kyrgyzstan. He offered a frank discussion with the Ambassador on a wide range of issues.
GFOELLER